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AUTHOR Sigelman, Carol K.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Violence is an integral part of American family life, yet little research exists concerning abuse among dating couples. To determine possible predictors of violence in college students' heterosexual relationships, 116 males and 388 females, or 94 percent of those contacted in psychology, sociology and nursing classes at Eastern Kentucky University, completed a six-part questionnaire consisting of demographic information; a short form of the Attitudes Toward Women Scale; the Social Desirability Scale; and three sections dealing with abuse. Statistical analyses showed that over half of both men and women had committed at least one physically violent act; men more often than women reported being the victims of such acts. Violence was found to be mutual, more characteristic of serious than casual relationships, and modestly related to sexual aggression. Men who abused their partners were not readily distinguished from those who did not, but tended to be young, low in family income, traditionalistic in attitudes toward women, abused as children, currently living with a woman, and from the traditionalistic Appalachian area. Women who abused were more readily discriminated and were low in social desirability, abused as children, and from non-Appalachian areas. Male victims were likely to be living with a woman and tended to be low in family income; female victims were likely to be living with a man, to be low in social desirability, and to have been abused as children. (Author/WAS)

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VIOLENCE IN COLLEGE STUDENTS' DATING RELATIONSHIPS

Carol K. Sigelman, Carol J. Berry, and Katharine A. Wiles

Eastern Kentucky University

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Abstract

In a survey of 504 college students examining predictors of violence in heterosexual relationships, over half of both men and women had committed at least one physically violent act, and men more often than women reported having been the victims of such acts. Violence was found to be mutual, more characteristic of serious than casual relationships, and modestly related to sexual aggression. In a series of discriminant analyses, men who abused their partners were not readily distinguished from men who did not, but tended to be young, low in family income, traditionalistic in attitudes toward women, abused as children, currently living with a woman, and from the traditionalistic Appalachian area. Women who abused were more readily discriminated and were low in social desirability, abused as children, and from non-Appalachian areas. Men who were abused were likely to be living with a woman and tended to be low in family income; similarly, cohabitation was related among women to being a target of violence, as was having been abused as a child and scoring low in social desirability. Findings are related to those of other studies of dating abuse, as well as to the family violence and aggression literatures.

VIOLENCE IN COLLEGE STUDENTS' DATING RELATIONSHIPS

By now it is well-established that violence is an integral part of American family life (e.g., Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). Yet because family violence researchers (e.g., Gelles, 1972) have tended to asssume that violence seldom occurs in dating and courtship relationships, the potential for abuse among dating couples has received little attention until very recently. In the past few years, a handful of surveys on college campuses have begun the task of describing the nature and prevalence of violence in dating relationships. In the first such study, Makepeace (1981) revealed that on one campus one out of every five students had experienced at least one incident of abuse, ranging in severity from slapping and hitting to life-threatening violence. Cate, Henton, Koval, Christopher, and Lloyd (1982) arrived at a similar figure, finding such violence to be reciprocal in two-thirds of the cases. Finally, Laner and Thompson (1982), expanding the inquiry to verbal abuse as well as physical abuse, reported that fully two-thirds of the students they surveyed had at least one brush with violence.

While these surveys have outlined the basic dimensions of the problem, they have done little to identify predictors of involvement in violent episodes. One generalization that has clearly emerged is that the likelihood of aggression increases with the seriousness of the relationship (Cate et al., 1982; Laner & Thompson, 1982). Indeed, family violence researchers Yllo and Straus (1981), after finding higher rates of physical aggression among cohabitating couples than among married couples, suggested that violence, rather than being a function of marriage itself, simply reflects the potential for intense conflict in any intimate relationship. If one takes this position, then one might expect the existing literature on family violence to be a fertile source of hypotheses about factors related to violence in premarital relationships. While students

of family violence (e.g., Gelles, 1980) concede that theory is in short supply, several signs point to the importance of social-psychological factors and socialization processes that would legitimize and breed aggression in heterosexual relationships.

The family violence literature consistently links violence to lower socioeconomic status (Gelles, 1980). Although Laner and Thompson (1982) failed to support this hypothesis in their dating abuse study, the hypothesis still warrants further exploration. The existing literature also supports the hypothesis that experience with violence as a child predisposes adults to violence (Carroll, 1977; Flynn, 1977; Rosenbaum & O'Leary, 1981). Indeed, Flynn (1977) found associations between both being abused as a child and witnessing violence between one's parents, on the one hand, and being either a victim or perpetrator of spouse abuse, on the other. In their dating abuse study, Laner and Thompson (1982) reported modest associations between having been abused as a child and both inflicting and experiencing violence, and suggested that the influence of having witnessed spouse abuse should be examined.

Finally, the role of sex-role attitudes in precipitating and legitimizing violence in heterosexual relationships warrants examination. Interestingly, the family violence literature reveals that husbands and wives abuse each other with roughly equal frequency (e.g., Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980), but writers have nonetheless speculated that both traditional sex roles and current shifts in sex-role attitudes may predispose marriage partners to violence (Hilberman, 1980; Walker, 1981). It is easy enough to understand how traditional sex-role socialization might predispose men to using aggression as a means of resolving conflicts or maintaining dominance. Burt (1980), for example, found men who engaged in high levels of sex-role stereotyping to be relatively accepting of violence in sexual relationships. Compared to more liberated men, those who

hold conservative sex-role attitudes also tend to have higher needs for dominance and to be more threatened by women with strong achievement motivation (Greenberg & Zeldow, 1977). Rosenbaum and O'Leary (1981) have provided limited but direct evidence that men who abuse their wives hold conservative attitudes toward women. Meanwhile, traditional sex-role attitudes among women would presumably encourage dependency and passivity in the face of male violence; indeed, female dependency is indeed correlated with abuse by one's spouse (Kalmuss & Straus, 1982). More recently, family violence researchers have suggested that feminism, rather than traditional femininity, may play a role in family violence. Focusing on power and status differentials within marital relationships, they have found that feminists are less satisfied than traditionalists with their relationships and are more given to confrontation in resolving conflicts (Wilson, 1982), and that violence is especially likely in marriages with status discrepancies, particularly when the wife's power in the relationship or occupational attainment is high relative to her husband's (Allen & Straus, 1979; Hornung, McCullough, & Sugimoto, 1981).

All of this points to the potential fruitfulness of examining sex-role attitudes in relationship to dating abuse, with the expectation that traditional sex-role attitudes among men may be associated with their involvement in violent relationships, while either highly traditional or highly liberated sex-role attitudes among women may be linked to such involvement. The recent family studies also hint that the degree of discrepancy between sex-role attitudes held by partners may predict violence.

If sex-role attitudes do play a role, their effects should be most noticeable in areas of the country where traditional sex-role stereotyping is still most widespread. Whereas previous studies of dating violence have been done in relatively liberal states, the present survey was conducted in the more traditionalistic Southeast; moreover, it included many students from rural

Appalachian areas, where there is reason to expect traditionalism to be especially strong (Rogers & Burdge, 1972; Willits, Bealer, & Crider, 1974).

The primary objective of the present study is to move the study of violence in college students' relationships beyond description and into prediction. Based on the family violence literature, it is predicted that experience with heterosexual violence is more likely among students involved in serious, specifically cohabiting, relationships; among those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds; and among those who received or witnessed abuse as a child. Special attention is focused on the relationship between sex-role attitudes and violence, especially on the possibility that traditional views among men, and either highly traditional or highly liberated views among women, predispose them to involvement in violent episodes with partners, as well as on the possibility that socialization into a highly traditional subculture heightens the potential for abuse by men.

In addition, the present study was designed to supplement and clarify previous descriptive work on violence in dating relationships. Since only Laner and Thompson (1982) even reported sex differences in rates of violence, the present study systematically compares the reported behavior of men and women, both as aggressors and as victims. Because Makepeace (1981) raises the issue of response bias in the reporting of violence, a measure of socially desirable responding was included as a check on response bias, as well as a variable of substantive interest in view of evidence that low need for approval is related to aggression in a laboratory setting (Taylor, 1970). In addition, the study extends inquiry to the southeastern region of the United States and explores selected characteristics of violence and relationships with violence. Finally, it examines not only physical violence but aggression in the context of sexual relations, a phenomenon also known to be relatively common in college students'

relationships (e.g., Kanin, 1967; Kirkpatrick & Kanin, 1957; Koss & Oros, 1982) but never studied in the context of physical violence.

Method

Participants

Participants in the study were 504 university students who filled out a questionnaire on a voluntary, anonymous, and confidential basis. Questionnaires were distributed in psychology, sociology, and nursing classes at Eastern Kentucky University, a state school with approximately 13,000 students located on the edge of the Appalachian Mountain chain. The 116 males and 388 females in the sample represented 94% of those to whom the questionnaire was distributed. The sample included a heavy representation of nursing majors (36.4%), along with students in law enforcement (8.2%), undeclared majors (8.0%), psychology majors (6.6%), and a broad scattering of other liberal arts and education majors. Most were freshmen and sophomores (66.9%), and the mean age was 21.4. The majority of respondents were Caucasian (89.3%); 18.1% were from rural areas, 47.6% from small towns and cities, and 34.2% from large cities or suburbs. Approximate family income was under $10,000 for 9.9%, $10,000 to $19,999 for 19.0%, $20,000 to $29,999 for 28.4%, and $30,000 or more for 42.7%. While this sample cannot be considered representative of the larger student population, the sampling procedure was consistent with those used in other studies of abuse in dating relationships.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of six sections. The first section requested demographic information. The second was the short form of the Attitudes toward Women Scale (AWS) developed by Spence and Helmreich (1972). The AWS measures views regarding the role of women in society, the privileges women ought or ought not to have, and beliefs about women. Like the original, the short form (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1973) is a Likert-type scale, with each item having

four response options ranging from strong agreement to strong disagreement. Item scores ranging from 0 to 3 are summed across the 25 items to yield a total score that can range from a highly traditionalistic 0 to a highly liberated or profeminist 75. Spence et al. (1973) report that the short form correlates with the full form at .97 for both males and females. Yoder, Rice, Adams, Priest, and Prince (1982) report adequate internal consistency and test-retest reliabilities for the short form, and others (Kilpatrick & Smith, 1974; Lunneborg, 1974) have provided evidence that the AWS has satisfactory construct validity.

The third section of the questionnaire was the Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlow, 1964). The scale, which measures the tendency to describe oneself in favorable or socially desirable ways, includes statements that are culturally acceptable but probably untrue and statements that are generally true but undesirable. Scoring of the 33-item scale involves adding points given for responses keyed in a socially desirable direction, with scores potentially ranging from 0 to 33 (maximum social desirability).

The final three sections of the questionnaire dealt with abuse. First, respondents completed a modified version of the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979), various adaptations of which have been widely used in studies of premarital and family violence. The modified version used here assessed whether respondents had ever experienced the eight Straus Form N items describing physically aggressive acts (see Table 1), both as perpetrator and as recipient. Response options were reduced from eight to three (never, once, more often). Two additional behaviors, both relating to sexual aggression, were also asked about in this section, using the same format as in the Conflict Tactics Scale: "used strong physical force to try to engage in a sex act against other's will," and "used violence to try to engage in a sex act against other's will." This

section also asked how many of the ten types of abuse the respondent had undergone as a child and had witnessed in his or her parents' relationship.

The fifth section was answered only by those who reported some involvement in violent relationships. It focused on the most recent relationship in which abuse had occurred, repeating the Conflict Tactics Scale items as they pertained to that relationship and exploring other characteristics of the relationship (the stage when abuse first occurred, the current status of the relationship, reasons for its termination, and the respondent's attitude toward the abuse).

Finally, the last section continued to ask respondents involved in abuse about their most recent abusive relationship while asking other respondents about a current dating relationship. It centered on the respondent's age at the onset of the relationship; the length of the relationship; the partner's educational status; the seriousness of the relationship; the power balance between partners; the respondent's overall evaluation of the relationship; and the respondent's and the partner's degrees of traditionality regarding what both men and women should be like (rated on 10-point scales).

Results

Rates of Physical Abuse

Overall, 53.6% of the male respondents and 52.1% of the female respondents reported having committed at least one of the eight physically abusive acts at some time. More men than women said that they had been the target of at least one such act, 58.9% versus 47.8%, $\underline{X}^2$ (1) = 4.31, $\underline{p} < .05$.

Table 1 reports the percentages of men and women who indicated that they had perpetrated or been victimized by each specific act. The data, of course, indicate only the reporting of some experience with an act, not the seriousness of particular instances of an act or frequency of involvement. The table makes it apparent that milder forms of physical aggression--pushing or shoving, slapping, and throwing things--are more common than are more serious acts. The

table also reveals both similarities and differences between men and women, as well as several striking correspondences between reports of acts committed by members of one sex and reports of acts received by members of the opposite sex. Analyses of sex differences revealed that women were more likely than men to slap partners, $\underline{X}^2(1) = 12.31$, $\underline{p} < .001$; corroborating them, males were more likely than females to report having been slapped, $\underline{X}^2(1) = 16.70$, $\underline{p} < .0001$. Women also said that they had done more kicking, hitting, or biting, $\underline{X}^2(1) = 5.58$, $\underline{p} < .05$, and men corroborated this by indicating that they more often than women had been the targets of such behavior, $\underline{X}^2(1) = 12.93$, $\underline{p} < .001$. Finally, somewhat more women than men claimed to have thrown things at partners, $\underline{X}^2(1) = 3.68$, $\underline{p} < .06$; more men than women reported having had things thrown at them, $\underline{X}^2(1) = 6.98$, $\underline{p} < .01$.

Insert Table 1 about here

Other sex differences were not as firmly corroborated by members of the opposite sex, although trends were in the proper directions. More men than women claimed to have pushed or shoved partners, $\underline{X}^2(1) = 7.27$, $\underline{p} < .01$, but women were only somewhat more likely than men to have been the targets of such behavior. Men were also more likely than women to report having been hit (or missed) with objects, $\underline{X}^2(1) = 4.31$, $\underline{p} < .05$.

Thus, women appear to be more likely than men to slap; kick, hit, or bite; and throw things at partners. Men appear to be more likely than women to engage in only one form of violence: pushing or shoving. Despite the absence of an overall significant difference between the sexes in commission of at least one form of physical aggression, then, it is women rather than men who show the greater tendency to engage in some of the more serious forms of violence. This

impression is verified by examination of the last five acts on the list, which are the most severe and infrequent. Not only have more women than men engaged in at least one of these acts, 26.4% vs. 16.4%, $\underline{X}^2(1) = 4.62$, $\underline{p} < .05$, but men more frequently report having been the target of at least one such act, 34.8% vs. 20.9%, $\underline{X}^2(1) = 9.21$, $\underline{p} < .01$. It should also be noted that while absolute rates of committing various acts by males closely match female's rates of having been the targets of such acts, women's rates of reporting acts tend to be lower than the corresponding male reports of being victimized by such acts.

Physical abuse in dating relationships was often mutual. For both men and women, having physically abused a partner in some way was strongly related to having been physically abused in some way (for men, $\underline{X}^2(1) = 44.41$, $\underline{p} < .0001$; for women, $\underline{X}^2(1) = 143.57$, $\underline{p} < .0001$). Indeed, of respondents who reported some experience with physical abuse, 67.3% had both committed it and received it rather than only one or the other.

Additional questions answered by those reporting some involvement in abuse about their most recent abusive relationship shed further light on the abuse phenomenon. Among the 215 respondents who completed the section on their most recent abusive relationship, the mean number of the eight acts committed by the respondent was 1.88, while the mean number committed by the partner was 1.80. Since the actual number of acts committed or received was either zero or one for over half of the respondents, these data suggest that most relationships involving abuse involve relatively little of it.

As in past studies, the vast majority (74.0%) of relationships with abuse were beyond the casual dating stage when the violence commenced. Follow-up questions also revealed that abuse reported by college students is not necessarily a campus phenomenon. Overall, 37.0% of the partners in abusive relationships were students at the same university as the respondent at the

time of the relationship; another 19.4% were students at other colleges or universities; 21.3% were high school students; and 22.3% were nonstudents. This breakdown of partner's educational status was not significantly different from the one pertaining to the current relationships of students who were not involved in any abusive relationship. Indeed, descriptions of abusive relationships were generally similar to descriptions of nonabusive current relationships. Respondents reporting on their most recent violent relationship did, on the average, evaluate that relationship more negatively on an eight-point scale than did students characterizing nonabusive relationships, F (1, 458) = 4.97, $p < .05$, but their mean response nonetheless corresponded to the categories "good" to "very good." Moreover, 53.7% of these relationships were ongoing at the time of the survey, and of those whose abusive relationships had ended, only 13.6% attributed the breakup entirely to the abusive behavior, with another 33.8% implicating abuse along with other reasons. Finally, on a five-point scale, 66.9% judged their own abusive behavior at least somewhat justifiable, and 43.4% conceded that their partner's acts were at least somewhat justified.

Sexual Violence

The two questions about sexual aggression were combined due to low rates of involvement in the more violent of the two forms of sexual aggression. As expected, more men than women admitted to such behavior, 11.8% versus 1.8%, $X^2(1) = 21.61$, $p < .001$; concomitantly, more women than men had been the targets of sexual aggression, 34.8% versus 20.9%, $X^2(1) = 9.21$, $p < .01$. It is noteworthy that both sexes reported being the victim of such behavior more often than the opposite sex reported committing it. It is also noteworthy that relationships between involvement in sexual abuse and involvement in physical abuse tended to be relatively weak, though significant. Among men, there was a small but significant association between having been sexually aggressive toward a partner and having been physically aggressive, $X^2(1) = 5.52$, $p < .01$, and a

near significant relationship between having been sexually and physically abused, $\chi^2(1) = 3.18$, $p < .10$. Women reported having committed sexual aggression too rarely to permit analysis; however, those who reported being the victims of sexual abuse also tended to be the victims of physical abuse, $\chi^2(1) = 30.13$, $p < .0001$.

Predictors of Involvement in Abuse

Separate analyses for male and female respondents were conducted to determine which of several predictors were related to both abusing a partner and being abused by a partner at some time. The eight predictors were age; family income (measured on a four-point scale with income ranges of $10,000 each, up to $30,000 and above); AWS score; social desirability score; having witnessed abuse in one's parental relationship (0 or 1); having been abused as a child (0 or 1); currently living with a member of the opposite sex (0 or 1); and residing in a federally-defined Appalachian county (0 or 1). Because the dependent variables were dichotomous (not involved vs. involved in abuse), discriminant analysis was used to determine each predictor's independent contribution to abuse involvement and the entire set of predictors' ability to differentiate between respondents involved and uninvolved in abuse.

As a preliminary to the discriminant analyses, product-moment correlations were computed between the eight predictors and each of the four dependent variables. The correlations, shown in Table 2, are generally weak and atttain statistical significance more often in the large female sample than in the smaller male sample. Nonetheless, they suggest the following: (1) among women, involvement in abuse tends to be associated with being older, having a low tendency toward socially desirable responding, having witnessed parents abusing each other, being abused, and living with a man; and (2) among men, involvement in abuse is associated with a low family income, living with a woman, and, with

respect to inflicting abuse, having traditional attitudes toward women and an Appalachian residence. Living with a member of the opposite sex was the most consistent predictor across abuse involvement measures.

Insert Table 2 about here

Since simple correlations leave the impacts of other predictors uncontrolled, it is necessary to examine the outcomes of the discriminant analyses in Table 3 to assess the independent contributions of individual predictors. Table 3 summarizes the four discriminant analyses, presenting standardized discriminant function coefficients, which indicate the relative contributions of the predictors in discriminating abuse-nonabuse status. Positive signs indicate a positive relationship between a variable and either abusing or being abused. Table 3 also presents the canonical correlation for each analysis--a measure of the ability of the entire set of independent variables to predict abuse status--as well as the statistical significance of each prediction equation. Also provided for each analysis is the percentage of cases correctly classified as involved or uninvolved in abuse, and the tau statistic, which can be interpreted as the percent of error reduction achieved by the prediction equation relative to the error rate that would be expected if participants were randomly assigned to abuse or nonabuse categories in proportion to the actual numbers of cases in the two categories. Finally, the statistical significance of the contribution made by individual predictors was determined by a serial deletion procedure in which the difference between the $\underline{X}^2$ for the full eight-predictor model and the $\underline{X}^2$ for a seven-predictor model with a given predictor omitted is itself a $\underline{X}^2$ indicative of the independent contribution of that predictor.

Insert Table 3 about here

To what extent can one predict which men will be abusive? While 67.98% of the men could be correctly classified as abusers or nonabusers, and this represented a 34% reduction in error below the chance error rate, the overall prediction model fell just short of significance. Standardized coefficients suggest that males who abuse partners tend to be relatively young, low in family income, $\underline{X}^2(1) = 3.05$, $\underline{p} < .10$, traditionalistic in their attitudes toward women, abused as children, currently living with a woman, and from an Appalachian county. However, due to the small sample size, none of these individual predictors made a significant contribution to the prediction of abuse.

In the larger female sample, a woman's status as an abuser or nonabuser could be predicted beyond chance expectation, with 63.25% of the cases correctly classified. Three predictors made significant independent contributions. Females who reported abusing partners were likely to score low in social desirability, $\underline{X}^2(1) = 8.78$, $\underline{p} < .01$, to have been abused as children, $\underline{X}^2(1) = 7.54$, $\underline{p} < .01$, and to come from a non-Appalachian area, $\underline{X}^2(1) = 4.86$, $\underline{p} < .05$.

Which men had been abused by their partners? Again, the overall prediction equation for males fell short of statistical significance, but men who were living with a woman were more likely to have been targets of abuse than those not doing so, $\underline{X}^2(1) = 4.27$, $\underline{p} < .05$. Coming from a lower income family also appeared to be related to being abused, but the relationship was not significant ($\underline{p} < .10$). The analysis predicting which women had been abused by partners was similar. Here the ability of the model to predict abusee status was significant, and the strongest individual predictor, as with men, was living with a member of the opposite sex, $\underline{X}^2(1) = 18.96$, $\underline{p} < .001$. Having been abused as a

child was also related to being abused by partners, $\underline{X}^2(1) = 7.02$, $\underline{p} < .01$, and again, there were signs that low socially desirable responding was associated with reporting involvement in abuse, $\underline{X}^2(1) = 5.32$, $\underline{p} < .05$.

Looking across the four discriminant analyses, several patterns seem clear. First, it is not easy to predict involvement in abuse. Even in the larger female sample, where relationships were statistically significant, the percentages of cases correctly classified as involved or uninvolved in abuse were modest. As for the specific predictors, age had little impact, and low family income appeared to be more related to male involvement in abuse than to female involvement in abuse. Attitude toward women, a construct of central interest in this study, was generally unrelated to involvement in abuse, but showed the most promise as a predictor of abuse by men, with more traditionalistic men, as predicted, being somewhat, but not significantly, more prone to abusing partners. Meanwhile, among women, socially desirable responding proved to be a significant predictor of reporting never to have abused or to have been abused by a partner. In addition, having been abused as a child proved to be more useful as a predictor of dating abuse than did having seen one's parents abuse one another, and was significantly predictive of female involvement in abuse. Moreover, there was evidence that the high traditionalism of Appalachian culture is associated with a weak tendency toward inflicting abuse among men coupled with a significant tendency toward refraining from such abuse among women. Finally, of all the predictors, living with a member of the opposite sex proved to be the most powerful, significantly predicting being the target of abuse for both men and women and also being positively but more weakly associated with inflicting abuse in both sexes.

Additional Explorations of Sex Role Attitudes

The Attitudes toward Women Scale proved to be only a weak predictor of

involvement in abuse, although the relationship between male traditionalism and perpetration of abuse warrants further exploration. The possibility that relationships were curvilinear in form had been explored and ruled out before the the linear techniques reported were applied; moreover, it was established that there was no socially desirable response bias on the AWS in either sex. Left to examine, however, was the possibility that attitudinal discrepancy between partners enhances the potential for violence. The present study included 10-point scales measuring traditionalism with respect to both male and female roles on the part of both the respondent and a partner described by the respondent. These scales were used to form a score representing the absolute difference between self and partner in attitudes toward women and a parallel score pertaining to attitudes toward men. For both males and females, the correlation between self-partner discrepancy in attitudes toward women and involvement in an abusive relationship was a modest .14 ($p < .08$ for men, $p < .01$ for women), suggesting that sex-role attitude discrepancy tends to be greater in abusive relationships than in nonabusive relationships. Self-partner discrepancy in attitudes toward men was unrelated to involvement in abuse.

Finally, the possibility that liberal sex-role attitudes are associated with ending an abusive relationship was examined. Among men reporting on their most recent abusive relationship, none of the sex-role variables predicted whether the relationship had ended or still continued. Among women, AWS score and self-partner discrepancy in attitudes toward men had no impact, but women who reported larger self-partner discrepancies in attitudes toward women were more likely to have ended their relationships ($r = .19$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

Although direct comparisons of studies of violence in the relationships of college students are hampered by differing items and methods of reporting rates of abuse, all signs indicate that the present study's rates, the first obtained

in the southeastern part of the United States, are higher than previously reported rates. Only Laner and Thompson (1982) reported more widespread involvement, and this is attributable largely to their inclusion of a verbal abuse item which more than half of their respondents endorsed. Comparisons of rates for specific acts--particularly comparisons with the Cate et al. (1982) data based on seven of the eight Straus items used here--confirm the impression that rates of experience with violence in the present study were high and imply that subcultural context has a bearing on the prevalence of physical violence in the relationships of college students.

The present study offers the first systematic examination of sex differences in abusive behavior. While neither sex was more likely to be abusive overall, women were more likely to slap; kick, hit, or bite; and throw things at partners. Indeed, women showed the greater proneness toward the more serious acts examined, with men being more likely than women to commit only acts involving pushing or shoving. These findings have a parallel in laboratory research showing that men are more likely than women to be given shocks in mixed-sex confrontations (Taylor, 1967; Shuntich & Shapiro, Note 1). At the same time, men were more likely to commit aggression in the context of sexual behavior, and this form of aggression proved to be only modestly, though significantly, related to physical violence. It is important to qualify this picture of violence in relationships, however, by noting that most instances of violence were mild, isolated, and inconsequential for the relationship.

While our ability to predict who inflicts and who receives aggression was limited, especially in the smaller male sample, several interesting relationships emerged. Like Laner and Thompson's (1982) dating abuse study and several studies of family abuse, the present study linked involvement in abuse to having

been abused as a child, though here the relationship was significant only for women. The findings also support Laner and Thompson in that abuse was largely unrelated to age and indicators of family socioeconomic status, though here there were near significant associations for men between abuse involvement and low family income. In addition, the present findings support those of both Laner and Thompson (1982) and Cate et al. (1982) by suggesting that abusive behavior is more likely in serious than in casual relationships. This link was most evident in the fact that living with a member of the opposite sex, married or unmarried, was the strongest and most consistent predictor of involvement in abuse, especially of being a target of abuse. It is unclear, however, whether intimacy is directly related to violence or whether it merely provides more opportunities for violence to occur. Whatever the case, all of these findings point to similar themes cutting across both the dating abuse and family abuse literatures.

Correlational and discriminant analyses also offered a methodological warning about research on this sensitive topic: the possibility that socially desirable responding, especially among women, leads to underreporting of experience with abusive behavior. The fact that men in the study tended to report being the targets of abuse more often than women reported inflicting it supports the notion of response bias in women's responses. However, it is also possible that personality characteristics associated with socially desirable responding are also associated with avoiding abusive relationships or behavior. Taylor's (1970) finding that persons low in social desirability are more likely to administer shocks to partners than are persons high in social desirability adds credibility to this interpretation, particularly if a low need for social approval implies weakened inhibitions against antisocial behavior. The relationship betwen social desirability and aggression surely warrants further exploration.

Finally, our attempt to examine relationships between sex-role attitudes and involvement in abuse failed to establish a strong association. While correlational analysis indicated that men with low scores on the Attitudes toward Women Scale were more likely to have abused partners than were more liberated men, the relationship faded in the discriminant analyses when other variables were controlled. At the same time, residence in Appalachia, known to be highly traditional in sex-role views, was positively but weakly associated for men with inflicting abuse and significantly associated for females with refraining from it. Moreover, large perceived discrepancies between self and partner in traditionality of attitudes toward women were associated among women with being involved in an abusive relationship and with having ended an abusive relationship. It would appear useful to measure the sex-role attitudes of dating partners and then examine the relationships of both absolute scores and partner compatibility in scores to abuse phenomena.

It is by now firmly established that physical violence occurs with some frequency in relationships involving college students. What is needed now is further examination of factors that can account for why some students are involved in abusive relationships and others are not, factors that might differentiate between relationships with only minor violence and relationships with serious and perpetual violence, and factors that can explain how dating violence is similar to and different from marital violence.

Reference Note

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Table 1

Percentages Reporting Some Involvement in

Eight Physically Abusive Acts

	Abuser		Abusee	
Act	Male	Female	Male	Female
Threw something	18.0	27.0	31.2	19.5
Pushed, shoved	42.3	28.8	37.5	42.3
Slapped	17.1	34.5	39.3	20.4
Kicked, hit, bit	9.0	18.4	27.7	13.3
Hit (or tried) with something	11.8	18.6	24.1	15.6
Beat up	2.7	1.3	3.6	3.6
Threatened with Knife/Gun	1.8	1.3	2.7	3.1
Used knife/gun	0.9	0.6	0.0	0.8

Note: Ns for males range from 110 to 112;

Ns for females from 379 to 384.

Table 2

Simple Correlations between

Predictor Variables and Involvement in Abuse *

	Abuser		Abusee	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Age	-.06	.11[a]	.11	.09[a]
Family income	-.26[b]	-.03	-.19[a]	-.10[a]
AWS	-.19[a]	.06	.02	.03
Social Desirability	-.06	-.20[c]	-.13	-.14[b]
Witnessed Parent abuse	.05	.14[b]	.06	.14[b]
Abused as child	.13	.17[c]	.08	.20[c]
Cohabitation	.18[a]	.11[a]	.19[a]	.23[c]
Appalachian	.17[a]	-.05	.12	.06

Note: Ns for males range from 97 to 111 and Ns for females from 338 to 381.

[a] $p < .05$

[b] $p < .01$

[c] $p < .001$

Table 3

Summary of the Discriminant

Analyses Predicting Abuse Involvement

	Abuser		Abusee	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Standardized Coefficients				
Age	-.41	.13	-.31	-.23
Family Income	-.55	.13	-.61	-.01
AWS	-.46	.04	-.19	-.15
Social Desirability	.18	-.58 *	.03	-.37 *
Witnessed Abuse	-.04	.22	.33	.22
Abused as Child	.38	.56 *	-.17	.44 *
Cohabitation	.49	.32	.74 *	.79 *
Appalachian Home	.46	-.45 *	.17	-.00
Canonical Correlation	.41	.30	.35	.36
χ^2	13.45	27.69	10.00	42.01
p	<.10	<.001	<.30	<.0001
% classified correctly	67.90	63.25	63.86	65.78
tau	.34	.26	.25	.31
N	81	302	83	301

* Significant at the .05 level or beyond.